

The sermon

Intro

Christianity is practical. It makes a difference in a person's life.

Christians are people of faith. People who believe the Bible. God's word gives shape to our lives. Every nook and cranny.

Christians are people who've experienced God's salvation. We have a Savior who died in our place, taking the punishment we deserve so we can have forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

As a result, we love God and value what he says.

Widow support is one of many areas where God's word touches our life.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

This morning we're considering a letter from the apostle Paul to his trusted colleague Timothy. The Ephesian church was messed up. So Paul sent Timothy to clean up the mess. We're learning from Paul's instructions to Timothy.

Point 1: Respectful conversations (5:1-2)

Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. – 5:1-2

From what we've gathered in this letter, Timothy's a young man who's gonna have a lot of uncomfortable conversations: you don't understand the Law of Moses, women can't teach men, you need to stop being a gossiping busybody. Do you want his job? What posture should Timothy take?

Respect

You don't treat an older man or woman like they're a child. You encourage a godly response rather than barking out orders. Timothy needs to respectfully point out their faults.

One of the Ten Commandments is "*Honor your father and mother*" (Exod 20:12) How does a grown man living on their own honor their parents? Honor continues but obedience doesn't. Parents aren't treated casually. Parents aren't verbally berated. Parents are encouraged to repent of sin in a respectful manner. Yes an adult son can encourage their parents towards godliness. Respect doesn't prevent correction. Timothy's going to be doing a lot of correction! A younger man in a position of leadership could do a lot of damage with his mouth!

Siblings

Deal with younger folks like siblings. Children, it's assumed you'd treat your sibling well!

Because men are designed by God to be attracted to women, Timothy needs to be on guard against sexual sin when dealing with younger women. And because women are designed to want the companionship of a man, some of the women might take a liking to Timothy. Timothy needs to be alert to temptations and compromising situations.

BIG PICTURE

A young pastor can't go around barking out orders to older folks and treating them like they're inferior. A son can't give his father a tongue lashing. A daughter-in-law can't scold her mother-in-law. Show older folks the respect and affection you'd give a mother.

Application

This is hard in a social media culture. We live in a divisive culture (e.g., politics) where respect for opponents doesn't happen. People, Christians included, have no problem verbally slamming those with different viewpoints. Whether the words we type or the links we post. This is a case where Christians ought not to imitate the world. We're called to a different way of life.

Consider making online posts with respect. God's word should affect our conversations.

Point 2: Who's a widow? (5:3, 5, 9-10)

Honor widows who are truly widows. – 5:3

Paul speaks of true widows. Some widows qualified for church support. Others didn't.

Honor involves respect. And financial support.

She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, – 5:5

The true widow is "*left all alone.*" She lacks financial means and family support. In Roman culture in 1st century, she didn't have social security or a pension or a 501(k) or a Roth IRA.

Women didn't automatically inherit their husband's estate. She might receive her dowry. The dowry was a sum of money given by the wife's family to the husband at marriage. The dowry became the husband's property to use at his discretion. With the dowry, the wife's family contributed to the start-up costs of a new household. If the dowry was too small, she wouldn't have enough to live on. But the dowry might go to the children. If the children used dowry for themselves, she had nothing.

The true widow is characterized by faith ("*has set her hope on God*") and prayer. She's a believer.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age,

Enrolled indicates a list of true widows. "*if*" indicates there's conditions attached. An age requirement. Why 60?

1. Remarriage was unlikely at 60.

Roman law stipulated women under 50 should remarry. So unsupported widows wouldn't burden the Roman Empire. 60 year old women weren't expected to remarry.

2. 60 was old in those days.

A woman's life expectancy back then was mid-20's or thirties. Estimates suggests only 6-8% of the population were over 60.

3. At age 60 she was incapable of working.

having been the wife of one husband,

Paul counsels remarriage for young widows (5:14), so the issue isn't can't be married twice. The issue is marital fidelity ("woman of one man").

and having a reputation for good works:

The next five phrases spell out good works.

if she has brought up children,

These five conditions answer the question, is she a Christian? It's not requiring an A+ Christian. Support is for "*any believing woman*" (5:16). These behaviors are characteristic of a Christian woman.

She faithfully served God in the home. A good work. Paul speaks from the norm. It's assumed a married woman will bear children. Paul's not disparaging women who can't conceive.

has shown hospitality,

She faithfully served God by opening her home to non-relatives.

has washed the feet of the saints,

She faithfully served God by serving God's people. Washing feet symbolizes humble service.

has cared for the afflicted,

She faithfully served God by caring for afflicted people. Saints who suffered tribulation because of their faith (loss of employment, beatings, imprisonment, etc).

and has devoted herself to every good work.

She's faithfully served God in a variety of ways. A well-rounded Christian life.

BIG PICTURE

Supported widows are Christians. They're at least 60 years old.

Application

Christianity is practical. It makes a difference in a person's life. Christianity, rightly practiced, affects every nook and cranny of our lives.

Point 3: Family responsibility (5:4, 8, 16)

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. – 5:4

Godliness is practical. Here godliness is providing financially for a parent or a grandparent.

Providing is repayment (return). As you were cared for, you care for those who cared for you. I joke with Luke that one day he's gonna get to change my diapers. I hope it doesn't come to that.

Note also that God is pleased by this godliness. The holy God can be satisfied with our less than perfect efforts. God loves the transformation he works in our hearts!

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. – 5:8

This is an attention getter meant to shock us out of our selfishness.

The idea is a Christian who fails to care for aged family does less than an unbeliever. It's assumed that non-Christians provide for the needs of aged family members. The Christian who fails to do so lives below the world. To do so is to deny the faith.

When we fail to provide for family, we tell the world that we don't care about God's word.

When we fail to provide for family, we tell the world that our faith makes no difference in our lives.

When we fail to provide for family, we tell the world that being born again is a myth.

If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows. – 5:16

The believing widow who can't provide for themselves must be cared for by her relatives. So there's money left in the church funds for widows without family.

"let her care for them" assumes a woman will do the bulk of the widow's care. Because the man is working a job to provide for the family.

BIG PICTURE

When family can provide for the widow it's their responsibility, not the church's responsibility.

Application

Paul's saying help those who don't have the means to care for themselves. The basics would be a place to live, food, drink, and clothing. There's numerous mitigating factors left unaddressed. Which child takes the widow in? How does the widow relate to the rules of the house? What do I do if my mother-in-law has Alzheimer's and I have young children or need to work so we can pay our mortgage?

Each situation should be handled on a case by case basis considering all relevant biblical principles.

Point 4: Church responsibility (5:11-12, 16)

We've gone over qualifications:

1. Must be a believer.
2. Must be 60 years old.
3. Must have no family who can provide.

But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry ¹² and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. – 5:11-12

Younger widows shouldn't be put on the list. Why? Because they have sexual passions (women are designed to be attracted to men) that are unmet if they remain a widow.

What's going on here? The order is sexual passions → fall away → desire to marry. They want their passions more than Jesus so they cast off the Christian faith. Then they desire to marry.

Falling away?

Note abandoning the faith, rejecting the gospel, falling away, results in condemnation. True Christians can't lose eternal life or justification, so true Christians can't experience condemnation. So truly born again people can't fall away. Those who fall away show themselves to have never been saved to begin with. Their faith was a sham. It's possible a truly born again person falls into doubt for a season. But truly born again people will come back.

If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows. – 5:16

BIG PICTURE

When there's no family around, it's the church's duty to financially support widows.

Application

God cares about widows. Let me read a jarring portion of the Old Testament.

You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, ²⁴ and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. – **Exodus 22:22-24**

God has a greater passion for justice than you do. The idea is when a judge accepted a bribe from the wealthy and allowed them to steal the widow's property, God was angry.

God cares for the widow more than you do!

In case you've come to the conclusion that God hates women or devalues women because of the Bible's teaching on roles in the home and roles in the church, I assure you that isn't the case. God may not agree with the prevailing sentiments of our culture, but he doesn't devalue women.

God wants men to talk to women in an honorable way. God wants men to treat women with purity, not as sex objects. God applauds the woman's contribution in the home. God wants widows provided for. And he's hot to punish those who abuse the widow.

Motherhood is glorious because it's God's good and wise design!

Modern day

What about today?

1. Widows today have access to social security, pensions, 501(k's), Roth IRA's, and some qualify for state aid.

The situation's different.

2. The deacons have given some funds to cover older women's bills when they find themselves overly pinched.

If you find yourself in a squeeze, talk to the deacons. Help is available to more than widows.

3. If a widow has nowhere to live, the deacons will address that on a case by case basis.

Point 5: Some pitfalls to avoid (5:6-7, 13-15)

but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. – 5:6-7

“dead even while she lives” = a living corpse = spiritually dead = some women in the church weren’t saved. Spiritual deadness manifested itself in self-indulgence = excessive, luxurious satisfaction of personal desires. In our culture, binge watching TV, over-eating, shopaholics, pornography, drunkenness.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. – 5:13

This is the young widow whose sexual passions led them away from Christ.

The assumption is they’re not working. If a young woman is supported by the church and has nothing to do with their time they’ll become idle and go from home to home gossiping and meddling in people’s lives (busybodies). It sounds like they don’t have children to care for.

So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. ¹⁵ For some have already strayed after Satan. – 5:14-15

Elsewhere Paul’s counsel to unmarried women is marry if you’re burning with passion, but if you’re not burning with passion, remain single because you’re free to give undivided attention to God without a husband to please (1 Cor 7:8-9, 34).

Here Paul’s counsel is remarry, have children, and manage a home. Straying after Satan = falling away.

BIG PICTURE

It’s best for young women to remarry rather than be supported by the church.

Application

Marriage is good. Motherhood is good. These are gifts of God to be received with thanksgiving.

It’s good to be productive. Nothing to do leads to idleness which leads to mischief.

Humans need more than pleasure! Humans need ambition. Godly ambitions. The true widow shows us we exist for communion with God and serving others, whether in the home, church, or the world.

Conclusion

Our world is broken. People die. Women are left without husbands and financial means. We selfishly fail to care for relatives. We lack self-control over our passions. We lack productive things to do with our time and meddle in the affairs of others. We’re broken and we live in a broken world with broken people.

What’s the antidote? It’s found in the widow who *“has set her hope on God”* (5:5).

It means looking for hope outside ourselves, outside humanity. It means seeing ourselves as we actually are: broken, disordered hearts, slaves to various passions.

The hope of the godly widow is Jesus Christ. That Jesus died for her sins. That Jesus has given her a new heart to fight her passions. That Jesus is coming again to bring her into a world where death and poverty and selfishness and sinful passions are a thing of the past.

If you see your need, I encourage you to confess your sins to God and ask for his forgiveness on the basis of Jesus’ death. Jesus death is worthy to take away every sin you’ve ever committed. Set your hope on Jesus’ promise of forgiveness, a new heart, and the world to come. And do life with his people in the church. Tell us if you believe.

Christian, hope set on God fuels godliness.